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ABSTRACT

This report provides observations and lessons learned by a study-visit team from the Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology (Canada) and the British Columbian Council on Admissions and Transfer. The study-visit was a reconnaissance of the reform of the post-school education and training system in the United Kingdom (UK), chiefly in England and Scotland. The team had two general study objectives: (1) determine the form and extent to which the learning outcomes approach is central to teaching and learning in the system of colleges and universities in England and Wales; and (2) determine the extent to which their credit transfer arrangements exist within and between colleges and universities, and learning outcomes form the basis of the assessment for establishing course equivalencies for transfer. The UK education and training system is undergoing profound changes as it moves from a historical elitist model to that of more democratic mass education system. Some of inter-related themes that have been investigated in the UK, which are relevant to issues in British Columbia include the following: provision of core/key skills for employability, citizenship, and personal development; assessment modes for outcomes-based learning; quality assurance policies and procedures; assisting college teachers to learn new instructional roles; and widening access, especially for those who were socially excluded. Appendices include "Glossary," "Study-Visit Itinerary and Key Informants," "Improving Student Learning Outcomes," "An historic Context," "The Structure of Education in England and Wales," and "Steps to Implementation in Wales." (JA)

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FROM ELITISM TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

DEVELOPMENT OF OUTCOMES-BASED LEARNING AND POST-SECONDARY CREDIT ACCUMULATION AND TRANSFER SYSTEMS IN ENGLAND AND WALES

A Report on Observations and Lessons Learned by a Study-Visit Team
from the Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology
and the BC Council on Admissions & Transfer

September 7 - 18, 1998

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

HIGHLIGHTS i

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ii

I. PREFACE

A. The Study-Visit: Rationale and Objectives 1
B. The Team's Interests and Perspectives 2
C. The Structure of UK Post-Secondary Education 3

II. SOME CURRENT EDUCATIONAL ISSUES 4

III. SUMMARY OF KEY OBSERVATIONS

A. Form and Extent of Learning Outcomes Approach 6
B. Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) Systems 8
C. Core or Key Skills 11
D. Institution Level Challenges 12
1. Funding Inadequacy 12
2. Funding Structure 13
3. Faculty Union Issues 14

IV. SOME LESSONS LEARNED 15

V. AREAS OF FURTHER INVESTIGATION 16

VI. SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY 16

APPENDICES

A. Glossary 18
B. Study-Visit Itinerary and Key Informants 21
C. Improving Student Learning Outcomes 22
D. An Historic Context: The Recent Past 24
E. The Structure of Education in England and Wales 29
F. Steps to Implementation in Wales: An Account of the CREDIS Project 30

HIGHLIGHTS

- the UK education and training system is undergoing profound changes as it moves from an historical elitist model to that of more democratic mass education system
- twin UK government goals of economic competitiveness and social inclusion appear to be driving major changes in the total education system including the further and higher education systems
- increasing influence from European Union policy and funding appears to have a steering effect that reinforces the UK government's economic and social goals
- UK government commitment to a national lifelong learning strategy has led to increased pressure to development a coherent, seamless education and training system that enables learners to accumulate and transfer credits from a gradually growing number of outcomes-based courses and programs
- Outcomes-based credit and accumulation systems have been developed in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales in recent years and are informing English initiatives
- Outcomes-based qualifications (NVQs and GNVQ's) in England and Wales:
  * form the basis of the majority of National Education and Training Targets
  * are the sole credentials offered by the 80 plus regional Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), and the Modern Apprenticeship program
- Key skills of numeracy, communications, and information technology are gradually being integrated into curriculum in senior secondary schools and tertiary levels, apparently with greater success in further education

Educational reform in the UK often appears to be informed by research-based inquiries – sometimes narrowly focused and occasionally wide-ranging – headed by articulate and esteemed educators. A list of inter-related themes that have been investigated in the UK in the recent past which are relevant to issues in British Columbia include:

- provision of core/key skills for employability, citizenship, and personal development
- assessment modes for outcomes-based learning
- quality assurance policies and procedures
- assisting college and university teachers to learn new instructional roles
- widening access, especially for those who were socially excluded
- a national strategy for provision of lifelong learning opportunities for all

Further investigation is called for in a number of areas, including:

- the contribution of the decentralized, community-based Open College Networks to the development of an outcomes-based credit accumulation and transfer system in Wales and England
- the development of outcomes-based approaches and associated credit accumulation and transfer schemes in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks are due to Val Davis, International Services Co-ordinator of the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA), and her colleagues in both the London and Blagdon centres. Val not only set up our study-team itinerary in England and Wales but also acted as our helpful guide and informant throughout much of our visit to London, the Bath area and Wales. Her colleagues in Fforwm, the Welsh counterpart to FEDA, proved equally hospitable and well-informed, and provided many useful insights into the sometimes significantly different developments in their Province.

Senior administrators, teaching staff and students in Bath College and Norton Radstock College freely shared their expertise and perspectives as we observed the issues, policies and practices of a rapidly changing and complex education and training system. The study team itinerary and key informants are found in the Appendices. We appreciated the generous time they gave us as well as relevant documents that were valuable additions to our study.

Thanks also go to Heather Sproule of C2T2 who was enormously helpful in setting up a variety of arrangements related to travel and accommodation as well as general communication with officials in both the London office of FEDA, and the University of Brighton.

This report is a collaborative effort of the study-visit team, all of whom contributed to its writing. The authors are responsible for any errors, omissions or misinterpretation of information, and all views in this report are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect those of the Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology.

I. PREFACE

This study was undertaken by a team of British Columbia educators whose experience with the British education and training system ranged considerably. While all members are experts in their fields, they had undertaken a selective summer reading program by way of orientation to the British system in general and aspects of recent reforms in particular. However few had ever encountered such a massive and complex education system in such an obvious state of flux - change driven not only by economic and technological factors but also by changing government policies and priorities. The rationale for this study, the perspectives of the team, and a brief review of the recent historic context of the political economy and education system of the UK follow. The appendices contain more detailed analysis of the political and social historical context of recent changes as well as an insightful discussion on improving student learning outcomes.

A. The Study-Visit: Rationale and Objectives

In September 1997 a two-person team from the Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology (C2T2) visited Britain courtesy of the British Council. The study-visit was a reconnaissance of the reform of the post-school education and training system in the UK, chiefly in England and Scotland.[1] During meetings with the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA) officials, Val Davis, international manager, proposed a reciprocal study-visit that would commence with a BC study-visit in the 1998 to be followed by a subsequent British team visit.[2]

The historic influence of British education and values on Canadians is indelible. British intellectual traditions and values infused Canadian institutions and thought for well over a century. While influence has diminished since the Second World War, there has been a renewed interest in the major reforms that are sweeping the United Kingdom this decade. This appears to be especially true regarding the systematic lifelong learning initiatives of the Blair government. What can we learn from the UK? What is of value and relevance to us? What mistakes can we avoid and what are some of the successful approaches we should consider?

Since FEDA was leading the debate in England and Wales regarding implementation of a credit accumulation and transfer system (CATS) that incorporated learning outcomes, senior officials at C2T2 expressed immediate interest in the proposed exchange. Ensuing correspondence resulted in a BC study team with joint representation from C2T2 (the BC organization that most closely parallels the role of FEDA) and the BC Council on Admissions & Transfer (BCCAT) - the system agency responsible for facilitating the

[1] Dunbar, Keith and Faris, Ron (1997) *Towards a Learning Nation: A View of Reform of UK Education and Training*, Centre for Curriculum, Transfer and Technology, Victoria BC.

[2] A team of 10-15 British college managers will visit BC in 2000 to view college system management practice and lifelong learning initiatives.

most extensive provincial credit transfer system in Canada. The two bodies shared a common interest in two general objectives of the study:

1. *to determine the form and extent to which the learning outcomes approach is central to teaching and learning in the system of colleges and universities in England and Wales, and*

2. *to determine the extent, in England and Wales, to which: credit transfer arrangements exist within and between colleges and universities, and learning outcomes form the basis of the assessment for establishing course equivalencies for transfer.*

Equally important, but more specific questions focused on the means and impact of implementing system-wide approaches to outcomes-based learning on 1) institutions, 2) personnel (administration, faculty and support staff), and most importantly 3) students and their learning.

Early arrangements made by FEDA that initially focused on the FE system, coincided with a highly-regarded international symposium on improving student learning in higher education. The theme of the 6th International Symposium on Improving Student Learning Outcomes, held at the University of Brighton just four days prior to the orientation to the Further Education system (see Appendix B – Study-Visit Itinerary and Key Informants), allowed team members to meet many educational researchers and lecturers interested in abilities-based education and the promotion of "deep learning" (see Appendix C – Improving Student Learning Outcomes). Such serendipity enabled not only greater opportunities for networking and learning more about best practice in higher education but also a fresh background for assessing aspects of further-higher education issues and relationships during the balance of the study-visit.

B. The Team's Interests and Perspectives

The rich and varied backgrounds of the study-team served it well. Constant but harmonious debate and discussions by team members throughout the visit ensured that if a one stone was unturned at one site it was turned at another. A brief summary of their present and recent roles gives a sense of the varied perspectives and experience brought to bear in this investigation:

Maureen Shaw - Chair of C2T2 Board, Secretary-Treasurer of the College-Institute Educators' Association of BC, and English instructor
Frank Gelin - Executive Director and Co-Chair of BCCAT, ex-college Vice-President (Academic Studies), and Psychology instructor
Mark Battersby – Senior Manager, Learning Outcomes, C2T2, and college Philosophy instructor
Gillies Malnarich – Special Projects, Research and Planning, C2T2, Douglas College Development Coordinator, and Developmental Studies instructor

Ron Faris - consultant, C2T2, ex-federal and provincial public servant, and university adult education instructor

The team, in total, represents about half a century of administrative and almost a century of teaching experience in five fields. Several members brought to bear considerable experience in developing and implementing learning outcomes approaches in British Columbia. One is a national leader in admissions and transfer issues, while yet another has provided provincial leadership in creating and implementing a provincial strategic plan based, in part, on learning outcomes-based reforms.

The over-arching perspective that all team members shared was provided by a consensus document on strategic reform for the college, institute and agency system, *Charting a New Course.* This strategic plan, produced by the Ministry of Advanced Education Training and Technology of British Columbia, calls for outcomes-based curriculum and outcomes-based standards. It also provides for a collaborative relationship between the C2T2 and the BCCAT in regard to transfer arrangements. C2T2 has a mandate with respect to provincial guidelines to provide comprehensive transfer agreements "linked to learning outcomes for academic and applied programs across the college, institute and agency system."BCCAT will provide advice to C2T2 but will have a mandate "to provide a linkage between the college, institute and agency system and the university sector in facilitating articulation, transfer and admission arrangements." It has a specific role to facilitate the transferability of post-secondary courses so that credit can be applied toward baccalaureate degrees in a wide range of areas.

Thus from such a shared perspective team members observed UK policy and practice related to the study-visit objectives, and sought to distil the major lessons they learned.

C. The Structure of UK Post-Secondary Education

To understand current policy and practice of any education and training system, one must know and understand something of the nature and scope of its structure. Nowhere is this truer than in the English and Welsh systems. For British Columbians, the massive English system, and even the very much smaller Welsh system, are relatively complex and confusing (the structure of the English and Welsh education systems is found in Appendix F).

The Higher Education sector is comprised of 136 universities and 56 Colleges of Higher Education in England and Wales (as well some 75 Further Education Colleges offer franchised higher education programs). Further Education is comprised of 250 Further Education Colleges in England in Wales (some 26 of which are in Wales). For purposes of this report the term "university" will be synonymous with Higher Education institutions and "college" will refer to Further Education establishments.

Several changes in both higher and further education systems in the 1990's are particularly important to the understanding of more recent dynamics. The creation in 1992 of a single

structure of higher education that combined the 'old universities' with the 'new universities' that had been polytechnics has had significant implications for higher education overall. First, the addition of over 70 'new universities' that had an original focus and culture of vocational education and related higher levels NVQs in fields such as engineering, technical areas, and management training served as a Trojan Horse filled with outcomes-based implications. Second, a process that combined forms of both "deregulation" and "privatization" of further education occurred at the same time and led to creation of independently incorporated institutions that were to compete for clientele at the same time as their funding was being reduced and student loads generally increased.

Further education colleges, which were the chief institutional focus of this study-visit, on average have a 10 million pound budget; 160 full-time teaching staff, and 100 support staff (some of whom are teaching assistants) dedicated to a range of vocational and academic programs. Sixteen to nineteen year-olds and the unemployed obtain free tuition while all others pay fees. Some key student participation trends are as follows:

- Most full-time students are 16 to 19 but FE students as a whole are, in the majority, over 25;
- Of about 3/4 million youth 16 to 19 in 1995/96, 38% had stayed in school while 45% were full or part-time FE students for a total stay on rate of 83%. This retention rate had increased to 83% from 58% six years before;
- A growing number of HE students now study in FE colleges - currently 13% of the total; and
- Overall, FE student growth has increased around 28% since 1993. [3]

Structural change of the education system mirrored that of the wider socio-economic system as well as that of a changing political culture. Some of these wider and more pervasive socio-economic and political drivers are discussed in Appendix D – An Historic Context. We now turn to several educational issues of the day.

II. SOME CURRENT EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

> **"Learning is the key to prosperity - for each of us as individuals, as well as for the nation as a whole. Investment in human capital will be the foundation of success in the knowledge-based global economy of the twenty-first century. This is why the government has put learning at the heart of its ambition."**
>
> Foreward by David Blunkett, Minister for Education and Employment,
> *The Learning Age: a renaissance for a new Britain*
> February 28, 1998

[3] There has been a massive increase in student numbers in Wales since 1993. Full-time enrolments rose by 63% and part-time by 156%. About 60% are female and 76% are over the age of 19. The largest program areas are: general education 18% of student numbers (GSCE, A level and A/S level), business and management 11%, caring and health 11%, and engineering 10%. Fforwm (1998) *The Further Education Sector in Wales 1993-1998: A Cause for Celebration*, Cardiff.

In the UK prestigious documents such as the Dearing higher education and the Kennedy further education reports appear to have considerable normative and political influence in the education community as well as government. On February 25,1998 the Blair government released not only its Green Paper on Lifelong Learning, *The Learning Age: a renaissance for a new Britain,* but also its responses to both the Dearing and Kennedy reports. In *The Learning Age* government proposed, among other matters, to:

- expand further and higher education to provide for an extra 500,000 people by 2002;
- double assistance for basic literacy and numeracy skills amongst adults to involve over 500,000 adults a year by 2002;
- set and publish clear targets for the skills and qualifications we want to achieve as a nation; and
- build a qualifications system which is easily understood, gives equal value to both academic and vocational learning, meets employer's and individual's needs and promotes the highest standards.

The Green Paper asserted that "the development of a collaborative network of tertiary education is a long-term objective of Government." It also urged development of a National Credit Accumulation and Transfer system "to underpin" a proposed national framework for higher education qualifications "so that people can build up blocks of qualifications over time and know what particular blocks of learning are worth."[4]

The response to the Kennedy report was somewhat more specific as it noted, with approval, that the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority was proposing "to undertake further work on the development of a unit-based framework, with particular reference to the needs of lifelong learning and vocational learning." [5]

The government was even more specific in its response to the Dearing report. It endorsed his call for institutions to develop programme specifications which

> "spell out the intended outcomes of each programme in terms of knowledge, understanding and skills, and the possible points along the way at which a student can stop off and get credit for what has been attained. Key or core skills, cognitive skills, and subject-specific skills should all be specified, particularly those most relevant to future employability."[6]

The Dearing response emphasized the need for a national credit accumulation and transfer system for England, noting that more advanced systems are already in place in Scotland and Wales. It noted that projects are being funded "to help integrate the different credit-awarding systems in England, while in Wales funding is being made available

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[4] Dfee (1998) *The Learning Age: a renaissance for a new Britain,* London. See URL: **http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/greenpaper/index.htm**

[5] DfEE (1998) *Further Education for the New Millennium: The Government's Response to "Learning Works"*, London. See URL: **http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/kennedy/index.htm**

[6] DfEE (1998) *Higher Education for the 21st Century: Response to the Dearing Report*, London. See URL: **http://www.lifelonglearning.co.uk/dearing/index.htm**

specifically to improve the linkages between credit accumulation and transfer systems in the further and higher education sectors and in Northern Ireland a regional credit accumulation and transfer system relating to both sectors is being developed."

The study-visit team viewed several aspects of a complex system at a time of substantial change. The historical antecedents and the evolving political culture provided a unique and dynamic context for the team's investigation. Hopefully, as this report now turns to more specific objectives of the study-team and its key observations, the reader will understand the trepidation with which they are offered.

III. SUMMARY OF KEY OBSERVATIONS

The following observations are made by a team of Canadians who were attempting understand, analyze and learn from the considerable thought and experience of British colleagues who clearly shared many of the same fundamental values and beliefs about the wider social, economic and civic purposes, as well as the human consequences of providing lifelong learning for all. More specifically, the team had two general study objectives:

1. *to determine the form and extent to which the learning outcomes approach is central to teaching and learning in the system of colleges and universities in England and Wales, and*

2. *to determine the extent, in England and Wales, to which:*
   credit transfer arrangements exist within and between colleges and universities, and
   learning outcomes form the basis of the assessment for establishing course equivalencies for transfer.

A. Form and Extent of Learning Outcomes Approach

A learning outcomes approach to curriculum design, instruction, and assessment is very evident in the Further Education sector. Learning outcomes are simply clear statements specifying what a learner should know, understand, and be able to do. Instructors or others who prepare curricular materials routinely use learning outcomes as a central focus to describe what will be expected of students when they complete a course or any particular learning module. Integral to this approach is the specification of assessment criteria against which a determination can be made as to whether the desired learning outcome has been achieved. It is intended that learning outcomes should specify the minimum achievement required at the point of assessment. However, it is clear that the identification of expected abilities and skills is central to curriculum development employed in the British college sector and much excellent work has been completed to enable one to study the efficacy of the UK version of learning outcomes.

The rationale for developing a learning outcomes based approach seems to come from two different but related sources. The first is a sincere desire by educators to improve the

learning process for students by specifying clearly what various educational programs are designed to achieve, with built-in measures of assessment to determine their success and to improve the overall quality and standards of education. Related to measures of assessment is the entire structure of funding which is linked to various accountability indicators such as audits of ongoing enrolment, course completions, etc. The learning outcomes approach lends itself to a detailed accountability framework and thus it is not surprising that funding mechanisms based on the achievement of learning outcomes would be put into place. It was felt by some that the funding mechanisms were as significant as the educational philosophy in driving the learning outcomes based approach to teaching and learning in England.

It is our feeling that the English system's competency-based approach to learning outcomes is overly detailed. Some programs have very thick manuals outlining in great detail hundreds, if not more, learning outcomes. From these outcomes flows equally detailed assessment procedures and recording of marks. Again the tolerance for complexity is note worthy. In speaking with a college instructor who teaches programs to prepare teachers who will be working in the college sector, it was learned that he encourages them to take a more flexible approach to achieving the specified learning outcomes. He argued that in reality many of the learning outcomes can be consolidated into larger and more general statements and assessment procedures can reflect that. The degree to which this latter approach is employed was not clear and probably varies considerably from program to program area. The Welsh system reflects this concept of flexibility by a statement in one of its publications. It states "Guidelines for the writing of learning outcomes have been developed. These are not prescriptive but are intended to provide support for practitioners developing curricula. Curriculum developers should interpret the guidance in a manner best suited to the subject matter and context of learning."

The provision and use of detailed competency-based learning outcomes varies among and within disciplines and various education sectors. For example, detailed learning outcomes exist for many A level programs but not all. Learning outcomes for A levels in History are apparently very general whereas learning outcomes for other A level subjects are very detailed. In one A levels class we attended, detailed learning outcomes existed and although used by the instructor, the students were not aware of them! Very prescriptive nationally developed standardized learning outcomes with related detailed assessment procedures exist for NVQs and GNVQs. Learning outcomes are used in the new polytechnic universities but with considerable flexibility. One Chair of a Psychology, Sociology, and Anthropology Division indicated that all faculty in his area are required to write learning outcomes for their courses "as a bureaucratic necessity" but the same learning outcomes are not required for any specific course. Two instructors teaching the same course may use different learning outcomes. This enables instructors to avoid having to reach agreement on their particular approach to the teaching or detailed requirements of any particular course. Furthermore, these learning outcomes were not shared between faculty.

From comments made by several faculty, it would appear that the learning outcomes approach is not as yet widely employed and is certainly not required in the teaching of arts and science courses at the research universities, although we had very little opportunity to verify this. There is a growing network of university practitioners involved in developing outcomes-based learning as well as associated key skills. Despite these initiatives, traditional university academics are apparently very sceptical of the use of the learning outcomes approach to adequately describe the integration and application of complex knowledge and skills expected in higher education. This scepticism is not as strongly perceived in the polytechnic universities where learning outcomes seem to work reasonably well in their applied programs.

B. Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) Systems

With the development of their national qualifications framework in a broadly-defined vocational field, the British have been concerned with creation of a system of credit accumulation and transfer. Credit accumulation is defined as the general process by which separate components of a qualification system can be separately achieved and certified, allowing the accumulation of such achievements over time. Credit transfer entails the recognition of credit gained in one qualification, or system of qualifications, as satisfying some or all of the requirements of a different qualification, or system of qualifications.

Most students wishing to enter directly into a university complete their final two years of academic study in a high school and write externally administered examinations the results of which certify that they have either passed or failed their "A levels". However, students can instead complete their A levels at a college and satisfy admission requirements for university entrance. Some students decide to complete their A levels at a college because of a greater diversity of choice in the A level disciplines available for study (e.g. Media Studies) than is available in their local high school. Students may also prefer the educational culture and format of the college's approach to teaching and learning. Typically, a full time student enrolled in A levels at a college would attend formal classes approximately 15 hours per week in contrast to attending 20-25 hours in a high school. A levels are often referred to as the "gold standard" and comprise the foundation upon which alternative approaches to preparing students for further post-secondary study are often compared. The "great divide" between the perceived status of a university academic education compared to a vocationally (employment) oriented education persists although efforts continue to be made to dispel these perceptions.

One major innovation that appears to have had considerable success is the establishment of a new educational credential for students 16 to 19 years of age. Rather than completing the traditional A levels, students can complete instead a GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualification) and like the A levels, this credential can be obtained through study at either a high school or a college. The educational content provided in this program "is not strictly speaking, vocational. It does not provide training for a specific trade or profession, but rather education in the application of knowledge and

understanding to a broad area of industrial or commercial life, and the development of general skills valued in the workplace" (Dearing, 1996). Out of concerns to enhance the recognition of this credential, some have argued that the title GNVQ should be changed to "Vocational A levels" or "Applied A levels". Although the vast majority of 16-19 year olds preparing for further study in higher education do not pursue this credential (80% pursue A levels; 20% pursue GNVQs), about 70% of those who have completed the advanced levels in the GNVQ have been successful in gaining admission to a university. However, normally the admission would be to one of the "new" universities where the GNVQ would be deemed to be appropriate preparation for further study towards an "applied degree." There are remarkable similarities in the philosophy and approach underlying this credential and the "applied academics" initiative currently underway in British Columbia.

We did not investigate and therefore will not comment in detail on the program of NVQ's (National Vocational Qualifications) which prepares students for direct employment in the trades and other occupations. However, the English system, with its myriad of different NVQs and complex system of assessment, regulatory, and awarding agencies (approximately 300) that certify the credential, illustrates a system with enormous tolerance for massive complexity. Despite the agenda to define national standards, over 60% of all vocational qualifications (over 17,000 of them) are outside of the national qualifications framework. Also lacking is a coherent system whereby students can ladder their NVQ into further study for a GNVQ and subsequent further degree study (although others might not share this perspective).

Mature students who wish to prepare for university entrance but who have not completed their A levels can enrol in "Access" programs at their local college. Successful completion of that program can lead to fulfilling admission requirements to the universities. These preparatory programs are held in high regard by the college sector and are reflected in significant numbers of mature adults who are able to gain entrance to the university sector via this route. Mature students are also admitted to the new "polytechnic" universities in England without completion of A levels, GVNQs, or an Access program. Instead they are admitted based on their work experience in business and industry, especially when that experience represents a relevant equivalence to other traditional prerequisites for university studies.

For many years England has had a system of polytechnics which offered students the opportunity to complete post-secondary degrees in various applied programs areas (e.g. engineering) rather than enrolling in one of the traditional research universities. Degrees from all the polytechnics were granted by an external centralized agency. Some years ago these polytechnics were formally designated as universities and allowed to grant degrees in their own names.

The colleges comprising the Further Education sector do not offer the first year or two of university transfer programs designed for transfer to a university (the Higher Education sector), as is the case in British Columbia. Their programs prepare students for admission

to the first year of degree studies at either the traditional research universities or the "new polytechnic" universities or prepare students for direct employment in various trades or occupations. But since the baccalaureate degrees in England are only 3 years in duration, one could argue that the both the high schools and the colleges offer the equivalent of what we call the first year of a university transfer program. But the A levels are in both traditional academic areas as well as in applied areas. Perhaps they are somewhat closer to what our schools at one time offered under the banner of Grade 13.

There is an arrangement where colleges do teach the first year of some applied degrees but they do so under a "franchise" arrangement with a specific university. The university sets the curriculum and the college is paid a grant by the university to deliver the program. The program is under the tight control of the university that franchises the program and the courses completed are considered university courses completed at the university that franchised the program. In this context, the courses are not really transfer courses. Very recently, the government has been concerned that it has been paying the universities too large a grant for such programs in that the college receives only a portion of that funding. In other words, the university is seen to be making an inappropriate profit by contracting out some of its own educational programs to a college, which can offer the program more cost effectively. The government does not object to the franchise arrangement but would prefer only to fund the actual cost incurred by the college.

Many team members were surprised to discover the lack of any developed system of transferability of courses within England's post-secondary system. We learned that very few students transfer between the universities and those who do are assessed on a case by case basis for course equivalency based on their student transcript. The essential problem is that there is no system of credits or other currency that enables courses to be deemed equivalent for the purposes of satisfying credential requirements. Some work has recently been started to remedy this situation and is referred to as the development of a CAT (credit accumulation and transfer) system. There are now national agencies within the United Kingdom with a mandate to develop a CAT system and appropriately have such titles as NICAT (Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer) and SCOTCAT (Scotland Credit Accumulation and Transfer). Wales has just completed a Welsh Higher Education Credit Framework and appears to be the furthest along in the development of a credit system. In England, we were advised that their development of a CAT framework was "not on a fast track" reflecting doubt about the ability to develop a workable credit transfer system in the short term. Because the development of a CAT framework is in its infancy and consequently there has been little actual experience in its application, it is too early to tell if the proposed system will in fact work. It is also not clear if the system will be designed primarily to allow students to move within the college sector or within the university sector in contrast to transfer from the college sector to the university sector. Certainly transfer arrangements within the college sector will likely involve some kind of assessment of equivalency of learning outcomes. It will be of value to learn more about this approach over the next few years.

C. Core or Key Skills

The team noted that during both the University of Brighton conference on learning theory and research in higher education, and the later investigation of further education practice that the issue of "key skills" was a central issue. Key skills were the new name for "core skills" that had been first identified in 1989 by the then Ministry of Education and Science. A common set of core skills was recommended in all post-16 education and training programs so that progression into employment or higher education was facilitated and as a means of aligning different forms of provision.

The original six core skills identified by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) included:

* communication
* numeracy (application of number)
* information technology
* problem solving
* personal skills (working with others, improving own learning and performance)
* competence in modern foreign languages

The numeracy, communications and information technology core skill units were introduced in 1992 in GNVQs. Core skill units were gradually being built into the 14 to 16 curriculum, the NVQ system and 'A' level courses in a few sixth forms as well as the foundation programs of the Open University. In all cases integration with a wide variety of delivery modes has been encouraged so that they are acquired through settings that contextualize them and give meaning to the students.

The term "key skills" was introduced in the 1996 Dearing report on *Review of Qualifications for 16-19 Year Olds* as skills in communication, the application of number and information technology. He urged that these skills be required by all students engaged in GCSE, A levels, GNVQs, and NVQs. Dearing noted that employers value certain general skills and expect them of GNVQ, A level and graduate job entrants. They included:

- Skills in working effectively with other people
- Presentational skills
- A problem-solving approach
- The ability to manage one's own learning as a necessity in a society that needs to be committed to life-long learning

Noticeably missing was a foreign language requirement. As we discussed the key skills with our British hosts it was apparent that many, despite their support for closer European ties, did not seem concerned that second language abilities was no longer a core skill - this at a time when the European Union is, with some success on the continent, promoting third language requirements.

D. Institution Level Challenges

1. Funding Inadequacy

The major problem facing the further education sector is underfunding. The new Labour government seems to be moving to correct some of the funding inequities but clearly the system is in crisis. The following presents the position of the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) in its 1998 report, *Evidence to the Inquiry into Further Education by the Education Sub-committee of the House of Commons Select Committee on Education and Employment*:

> the chronic underfunding of further education has seriously damaged its financial health and ... unless there is an urgent injection of funds, the sector will not be able to meet the challenges the government has set for it, in fulfilling its vital role in building the learning society and meeting the skills needs for Britain to compete internationally. Indeed, there is now the danger that the FEFC [Further Education Funding Council] may be failing its statutory duty, under the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, to ensure 'sufficient and adequate facilities' throughout the country.

Further compounding the funding challenge is the structure, methodology, and source of colleges' funding. Since being incorporated in 1993, with appointed boards made up primarily of business and industry representatives (who select the new governors), the colleges have had to become more entrepreneurial and market driven. As noted in the 1998 NATFE report, *Learning Funding: The Impact of FEFC Funding, Evidence from Twelve Further Education Colleges,* colleges survival would depend on their efficiency in recruiting the students and achieving the outcomes on which their funding depended.

The facts concerning further education's financial state are well known. In 1997-98:

- 86.5 % of colleges have reduced funding;
- the equivalent of 43 000 FTE student places have been lost;
- the efficiency savings are on average 7.6%;
- 275 colleges are operating with a deficit compared with 204 in 1994 and 263 in 1995;
- in July 1996 80 colleges had accumulated deficits as compared with 50 in 1994 and 70 in 1995;
- fewer than half the colleges - 43 % (191) are now described as being in 'robust financial health.' The percentage that could so he described was 70 % in 1994;
- over a quarter of all colleges - 27% (119) are now described as being in 'weak financial health'- a significant increase from just 6% in 1994;
- 28 colleges have reported that they can no longer fulfil their statutory duty to provide 'adequate and sufficient facilities.'

In 1995-96 the sector deficit was £112 million compared to 6 million in 1993-94. This is almost an 18-fold increase.

NATFHE is not alone in its alarm at the state of the sector's financial health - Sir Robert Gunn, Further Education Funding Council Chair, states in the 1997-8 FEFC annual report:

> "Financial pressures have obliged college management to take stringent measures in order to maintain solvency and achieve efficiency gains. This has led to continuing staff redundancies, restrictions and contractions in provision in many institutions ... The Council believes that the new administration must address urgently the weakening financial health of the college sector if reductions in essential provision in future years are to be avoided ... without secure finances, colleges will be weakened. They will find it increasingly difficult to respond effectively to the needs of their communities, and ultimately quality will decline."

2. Funding Structure

The government has been attempting to develop "a national framework of funding" as part of a national training strategy and has removed local authority control spending. Part of the funding changes include "convergence", through which average level of funding (ALF) of each college was designed to converge by 1996-97 to between f.18/20 per unit of the median." This funding mechanism, however, has problems in meeting the diverse needs of all the diverse colleges in Britain.

In addition, the portion of government funding (approximately 70%) going to colleges now is tied to various performance factors: initial enrolment, services to students, retention and achievement. If students drop out or fail, the funding is stopped. The consequential effect on standards is becoming apparent. The number of course contact hours has been dropping for over a decade and the funding methodology defines the number of contact hours in each program. Therefore students now have fewer contact hours, but face larger class sizes. Many of the students in the colleges are those who need more support for their learning and their needs are often not being met.

Colleges are also, as corporations, supposed to seek up to 30% outside funding. Some, such as Norton Radstock College, in a small mining town with high unemployment, have succeeded in accessing European Union money that has allowed the college to upgrade many of its facilities, especially in high technology.

Many of the problems evident within the further education sector and to a certain extent the higher education sector have emerged because of ill-conceived attempts to standardize funding and impose a market-drive, competitive model. Faculty are suffering the consequences, as are many administrators. Student enrolment is increasing but the quality of education and training may be declining, despite everyone's best efforts. The new Labour government may be able to bring about some improvements. It has apparently recognized there is a funding crisis and it is more prepared to operate in a spirit of partnership and co-operation. Clearly though, more money and changes will be needed to address the myriad problems brought about by the earlier government approaches.

3. Faculty Union Issues

The study team wished to understand the effects of policy changes and shifts in funding structures on instructors and professors in both HE and FE. In discussions with higher education professors at the conference 'Improving Student Learning Outcomes' we began to realize that many of the changes in policy and the structure of post-secondary education had profound effects on the workloads of professors. They seemed at a loss on how to counteract the workload burdens, given the apparent weakness of their unions. At the polytechnics, now 'new universities the professors maintained a teaching load of 18 contact hours with increasing numbers of students in classes. They also faced the new added imperative to produce original research in order to maintain a position or attain promotion. One accounting professor outlined the difficulties of producing original research as well as teaching the large numbers of students in a field such as accounting.

A meeting with Dan Taubman, Assistant Secretary FE (Education) of NATFHE (National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education, also known as the University and College Lecturers' Union) revealed further insights into the problems that have emerged since the 1980's. Taubman indicated the NATFHE supported many of the policy directions that were being undertaken in further and higher education, but the implementation process had many adverse effects for the membership of NATHFE. Like CIEA, NATFHE has always been involved in policy and professional issues as well as in collective bargaining and contract administration. However, during the Thatcher period NATFHE's influence diminished and it was shut out of much policy development with government. in addition, NATFHE's membership has declined dramatically because of "redundancies' (lay-offs) and 'casualisation' (contracting out of work through agencies which hire part time instructors as self-employed agents). Margaret Thatcher had also made closed union shops illegal.

Some of the statistics he supplied showed that:

- Membership was currently 65,000 (approximately) down 15,000 from 1988;
- 40% of the workforce in the colleges is part time;
- there had been 109% growth in student numbers from 1993-96 while funding per student dropped by 34%; and
- 18,000 redundancies (lay-offs) in 1993-97.

A national contract that existed before the incorporation of further education colleges in 1993 was essentially torn up and contracts were imposed at individual colleges drastically altering the terms and conditions of instructors' work. NATFHE had bargained a tentative new national contract but the losses are evident in these two examples.

Old Contract (pre 1993)	**New National Contract** (out for ratification)
36 weeks attendance at College	42 weeks
14 week holidays	10 week holidays

Taubman indicated that morale in colleges had reached 'rock bottom' with 'heavy managerialism' – bullying and intimidation of lecturers – being the norm and many labour disputes the result. In a meeting with one college principal we witnessed firsthand the attitude of 'macho managerialism' that Taubman described. This principal talked with pride of having "smashed the union'', " blitzed the staff" and thus "turned the college around". The membership in that college's union was approximately 17%, and individual faculty members certainly seemed intimidated and subdued. Most everyone appeared to be preoccupied with performance and efficiency reporting. At this college, learning outcomes were mostly tied to performance reporting, not an integral part of curricular reform or student learning.

IV. SOME LESSONS LEARNED

It is worth noting that some excellent work is being completed that attempts to counter the scepticism that learning outcomes do not have meaningful application in the upper levels of advanced learning (see Appendix C for a review of some of the leading-edge theory that informed some of the discussion at the University of Brighton conference on Improving Student Learning Outcomes). A document from Northern Ireland refers to the teaching of "intellectual skills and attributes" and defines this to mean "reflecting knowledge and understanding, application, analysis, synthesis/creativity and evaluation." As part of a larger government initiative applicable to all education sectors, several of the "new" universities have been attempting to identify "key skills" that all students are expected to achieve (e.g. information literacy). Rather than teaching these key skills as separate units of instruction the notion is that they are fully integrated into the curriculum of the discipline being studied and are assessed in conjunction with testing the understanding of the traditional course content. It is our perception that this approach, which is similar to the C2T2 approach, might be quite acceptable to many academics in the BC system.

A lesson for British Columbia faculty could well be that once a faculty union has lost its right to bargain for all faculty, it will never regain that right. Even with a Labour government, many of the union rights lost under the Tories were not restored by the new government. Thus in relative terms, the UK faculty has lost considerable influence. Simply put, it has been "dis-empowered".

Overall, the study tour left us with a greater appreciation of some of the elements of our post-secondary system that provide a distinct advantage over theirs. Our community colleges offer a comprehensive curriculum of preparatory, academic, technical, and vocational studies. The close proximity of students and instructors within a common governance and administrative framework allows for the potential of a cross fertilization of ideas and approaches in one program area to influence the instructional style, curriculum, and learning approaches in another. The absence of any focused academic program other than some A levels in the English colleges limits the influence of an academic education, with its emphasis on a general education for citizenship, on occupationally oriented programs. Likewise, there is limited opportunity for academic programs to benefit from the values and approaches that stem from occupationally

oriented programs. In England, there is no framework of credits or other measure that allows for the easy transfer of courses and programs between post-secondary institutions although England is endeavouring to develop such a system. However, the clear divisions of responsibility in the teaching of academic and applied programs will make it that much more difficult to negotiate transfer credits between occupationally oriented programs in the colleges or in technical degree programs in the new polytechnic universities to baccalaureate degree programs in the research universities. Overall, the dichotomy of vocational training for employment and academic education for citizenship is unfortunate and to some degree perpetuates a class system with discrete tracks for students with little hope of changing educational goals and aspirations.

V. AREAS OF FURTHER INVESTIGATION

Further investigation is called for in a number of areas in which British experience, expertise and perspectives could add value to post-secondary initiatives in British Columbia, including:

- the contribution of the decentralized, community-based Open College Networks to the development of an outcomes-based credit accumulation and transfer system in Wales and England
- the development of outcomes-based approaches and associated credit accumulation and transfer schemes in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales
- implementation and assessment of key skills
- the British (Scottish and English) approach to quality assurance, and funding for results
- the role and impact of research on practice

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APPENDICES

A. GLOSSARY

There is an alphabet soup of abbreviations and acronyms used in the UK education and education system. Below are some of the terms and concepts that the study-visit team often encountered, and will appear in the body of this report.

Abbreviations / Acronyms

'A' level - Advanced level General Certificate in Education (**GCE**) an 'academic' qualification taken in different subjects, normally at the end of schooling, around 18 years old. The 'A' level is graded, and normal university requirements stipulate three 'A' levels at 'good' grades, normally A, B or C. Entrance requirements for some universities on some courses stipulate very high grades, for example AAA or ABB. Exceptional students sometimes study four or more subjects, The external examination for this prestigious qualification, sometimes called the "gold standard", is deemed suitable for only about 30 per cent of the population.

'A/S' levels - Advanced Supplementary **GCEs**, introduced to broaden the curriculum, are deemed half an 'A' level. They have proved unpopular because they are not simply the first half of a twoyear course, they usually cover aspects of the whole course. Thus many teachers consider them to be more demanding on students, and involve a disproportionate use of staffing resources.

CATS - Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems

DfEE - the national Department for Education and Employment.

FE - Further Education, post-16 full time or part-time education and training; students may progress to other, higher level FE courses, to HE or into employment. FE colleges are major providers of **NVQs** and **GNVQs**.

FEDA - the Further Education Development Agency.

GCSE - **General Certificate of Secondary Education**, an examination available in all school subjects, taken separately, normally at age 16.

HE - Higher Education, now mostly provided by universities.

OCN - Open College Networks

'O' level - **GCE** Ordinary level examination, normally taken at 16 years old, the end of compulsory schooling in the UK; now superseded by the **GCSE**.

Sixth Form - The highest level of secondary school. Equivalent to a grade 13 or first year university.

TEC - Training and Enterprise Council

Concepts

Credit Accumulation - the general process by which separate components of a qualification system can be separately achieved and certified, allowing the accumulation of such achievements over time.

Credit Transfer - the recognition of a credit gained in one qualification, or system of qualifications, as satisfying some or all of the requirements of a different qualification, or system of qualifications. It alleviates the need for repeating assessments (and possibly training) for the award, or that part of the award, for which recognition is given in the second qualification or system.

Credit-based Qualifications System - as proposed by FEDA, a framework would serve as an infrastructure for all qualifications and awards that require their component units (or sub-sets) to be clearly stated. The building blocks of this credit framework are units of assessment. A unit of assessment is a coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes, the achievement of which gains the learner a defined number of credits at a specified level. Units may be any size and therefore carry different credit values. A unit of assessment consists of:

* title or subject name
* learning outcomes - what a learner knows, understands and can do.
* assessment criteria - standards for achieving outcomes
* level -level of difficulty/achievement (eight would be needed covering from the schools National Curriculum to HE/professional qualifications)
* size expressed as a credit value

The 'credit value' of a unit is formed by agreeing to the notional learning time (including teacher contact and independent study) set for a learner to achieve the defined outcomes of a unit at a specified level. This total

number of notional hours is divided by 30 to establish the credit value for a unit or program – one credit is the value given to the outcomes achieved through 30 notional hours of learning activity. A national database of units will enable all providers to package units for learners. It will allow:

* achievement of units in many learning environments, whether work, community or college-based
* clearer and more efficient progression routes in college or work-based learning
* programs to be customized for employers
* programs to be individualized for learners so that repetition or unwanted learning is unnecessary

General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) - a broad-based vocational qualification, assessed to national standards, which attests to attainment of general skills (including core or key skills) knowledge and nderstanding that underpin a range of occupations, providing certification that enables entrance to employment or pursuit of further or higher education and training. GNVQs are specified in the form of learning outcomes to be achieved; they are made up of a number of units, and credit may be awarded for each unit separately. Although GNVQs are normally delivered through full time programs (e.g. in school or college) access to assessment is open to all and the award of a GNVQ may be made to all who meet the required standards, irrespective of time taken or the mode of learning.

National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) - a qualification previously accredited by the National Council for Vocational Qualifications which has recently merged (1997) with the School and Curriculum Council to form the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. All NVQs are allocated a place with the NVQ framework and are required to meet specified criteria for accreditation. NVQs attest competence in the workplace while GNVQs imply acquisition of a foundation of general skills and the knowledge and understanding that underpin a range of occupations rather than the competence to perform immediately in any particular occupation.

B. STUDY-VISIT ITINERARY AND KEY INFORMANTS

September 7-9 - University of Brighton

Participation in the 6th International Symposium on *Improving Student Learning* at the University of Brighton, Falmer Campus

September 10 – FEDA London Office

Briefings on the overall system and specific initiatives.

Val Davis, FEDA - Briefing on UK Education
Tony Tait, FEDA - Credit and Unitization Development

September 11 – FEDA

Dr. Graham Peeke, FEDA – The Development of National Standards for FE Teachers
Dan Taubman, NATFHE – The Teachers Union Perspective of the Recent Past and Current Issues
Jill Attewall, FEDA – QUILT: The National Program for Staff Development in ILT
Muriel Green, FEDA – The Key Skills

September 14 – FEDA Mendip Centre

Visit to the City of Bath College

September 15 – FEDA Mendip Centre

Visit to Norton Radstock College

September 16 – FEDA Mendip Centre

Visit to Fforum, the Welsh College's organization in Cardiff, Wales.

September 17 – return to London

Chris Wood at QCA (Qualifications & Curriculum Authority)

September 18 – London

Open College Network of London

C. IMPROVING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

How can we improve student learning? This question, asked by educators at all levels of the education system, has been a central focus of an annual International Improving Student Learning Symposium in Higher Education. Initiated in 1993 by the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, Brookes University, each symposium attracts educational researchers and lecturers from Europe with some representatives from other continents.

The first symposium's theme, 'Implications of Theory for Practice', has continued to influence the content of papers and discussion at subsequent meetings. Various topics have been examined in relation to improving student learning such as the effects of assessments and evaluation on learning, the use of classroom-based assessment techniques and research, the principles of course design, as well as a focus on students as learners.

The sixth symposium, attended by the study-visit team, addressed improving student learning outcomes, with an emphasis on examining the research evidence regarding what students actually know when they complete a program of studies and what teachers in higher education might do to influence these learning outcomes. Symposium keynotes summarized the developments and use of learning outcomes in the UK, research-based guidelines for improving teaching, assessment and learning, and the institutional implications of a transmission metaphor of teaching and learning where knowledge is presented by teachers and acquired by students. Presentations touched on the multiple facets of learning outcomes from models to assess outcomes in terms of 'hidden' indicators, or students' internal learning processes, to ways to integrate the teaching and assessing of essential abilities such as information literacy, critical thinking and effective communication into subject area instruction.

For teachers discouraged by approaches to improving student learning that emphasize general teaching principles or general learning skills, the approach taken by symposia organizers and presenters is a welcome change. As the discussions at the 6th Symposium and the series of previous proceedings indicate, 'coverage' or how much someone knows is of little interest to participants. Instead, apprehended content of the 'what' of student learning provides the context of inquiry. Contributors are committed to improving students' understanding of key conceptions in a specific field of study through research-based teaching and assessment efforts.

For many educators working in higher education, the annual International Improving Student Learning Symposium has become an occasion to develop and extend the influence of an approach to improving student learning pioneered by educational researchers in the late 1970' and 1980's from Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Australia. (See Marton, Hounsell and Entwistle, 1984 and Ramsden, 1988). This work, which eventually tied students' conceptions of knowledge to their approaches to learning, and hence, to what they actually learn or 'learning outcomes', introduced the notion of

'deep learning' into conversations about improving student learning. Based on a decade of findings from investigation with students about their experiences of learning, researchers made a critical distinction between two kinds of understanding. The first, referred to as 'surface learning', describes understanding that skates along the surface of a phenomenon and is associated with a quantitative conception of knowledge or a preoccupation with the quantity of learning or 'how much' someone knows. By contrast, 'deep learning' represents a change in previous thinking about phenomenon and is associated with a qualitative conception of knowledge or the 'what' of meaningful, enduring learning.

An often-quoted study from this early research on the learning of physics reveals the dilemma faced by educators interested in improving student learning in educational settings where the impact of teaching and assessment practices on the quality of student learning is rarely investigated. In brief, researchers discovered that when successful graduates from upper-level physics courses were asked to solve a problem requiring them to draw on Newton's conception of force, they instead used common sense reasoning prevalent amongst people who have not studied physics that in fact represents an Aristotelian conception of force. Most students who received high marks on physics exams, owing in part to their ability to summarize Newton's laws of motion, could not offer a scientifically accurate response to this problem: a car is driven along a motorway in a straight line at a constant speed. What forces act on the car? As researchers went on to discover, the conceptions of phenomenon students already hold in any subject area prior to instruction have an impressive staying power, unchallenged as they are by classroom practices that, despite educator's expressed values, encourage superficial learning of detailed content.

Many educators, especially classroom instructors, will find the approach to educational research associated with the symposia on Improving Student Learning refreshingly relevant since the work tends to a address a nagging shared concern: what does someone actually learn in my course, why, and how might I influence this outcome?

Resources

If you are interested in finding out more about this thought-provoking work, two collections of research studies provide a comprehensive introduction to the educational research paradigm that informs the International Improving Student Learning Symposia.

Marton, F., Hounsell, D. & Entwistle, N. (eds) (1984). *The Experience of Learning*, Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh.

Ramsden, P. (ed) (1998). *Improving Learning: New Perspectives*, Kogan Page, London.

The Website for the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development at Oxford Brookes University (ocsld@brookes.ac.uk) includes a summary of symposia proceedings as well as a wealth of information related to abilities-based education in the UK. See URL: http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsld/

D. AN HISTORIC CONTEXT: THE RECENT PAST

I. Some Socio-Economic and Political Factors

"One major, and disturbing, challenge in recent years has been the widening of social and economic inequality. With it have come increased poverty, social exclusion and reduced life chances for those who have not benefited from economic growth, greater prosperity and new opportunities."

Learning for the Twenty-First Century
First report of the National Advisory Group for
Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning
November 1997

As early as the 1960's it was increasingly apparent that the old heavy manufacturing or "smoke stack" industries of Britain, and their workers, were facing a bleak future. Shipbuilding, coal mining and the associated steel industry were all being challenged by a combination of lower cost foreign competition and changing technologies - the engines of what is now termed globalization.

Yet significant economic restructuring was impossible without related structural and attitudinal change in a society mired in a social class system that affected life chances, including educational opportunities, for vast numbers of Britons.

Diverse changes in the domestic and international political cultures were occurring that would effect the political economy of the UK as well as its erstwhile allies in Europe. The UK in the nineteen eighties saw the domination of a political ideology that combined faith in the market mechanism and competition to efficiently allocate resources, including education and training, with a tendency to centralize decision-making in the national government.

A significantly different political economy was being forged through the growing structures and influence of the European Union. A European social charter associated with the economic union assured citizens in the poorest member-states of Europe such as Spain, Italy, and Greece of basic levels of education, health care and social services. Further, special financial packages, such as the European Social Fund, aimed at distressed regions, greatly aided nations such as Ireland to improve its socio-economic status.[7] Thus a countervailing force to the dominant ideology of Britain in the 1980's was slowly emerging.[8]

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[7] The European Social Fund is one of several Structural Funds of the European Union that aid socially and economically distressed areas or industries to prevent unemployment or develop new jobs through training, and to generally add to both competitiveness and social inclusion.

[8] See Stephen McNair "Outcomes and Autonomy" in Burke, John ed. (1995) *Outcomes, Learning and the Curriculum: Implications for NVQ's, GNVQ's and other qualifications,* The Falmer Press, London pp.215-16. McNair suggests that the dominant UK culture, based on selection and exclusion, set low expectations for most individuals who responded with low achievement.

II. Some Educational Challenges

By the mid-eighties elements of the UK elites were realizing that all was not well in Britain, and especially its tradition-bound and complex education and training system. The Chamber of British Industry (CBI), for instance, conducted several studies that revealed that, on an international comparative basis, the nation was lagging badly behind many of its competitors in terms of the quantity and quality of its work force training - from management to shop floor. It and other industry leaders also realized that there was chaos in the credentialing systems of the day. A National Vocational Qualifications Council, formed in 1986 to create a national qualifications framework and devise a system to rationalize the incredibly complex and confusing plethora of vocational credentials and related awarding bodies, was gradually winning support of industry (union and management) leaders despite opposition from some university professors.[9]

CBI, in collaboration with the national Trades Union Congress, also devised and promoted to government a set of National Education and Training Targets - expressed chiefly in terms of acquisition of outcomes-based measures of the emerging National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) system.[10] By 1992 some 180 colleges and schools had begun to experiment with a new, more general education qualification, the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ).

By the early 1990's there appeared to be a growing awareness that there must be a significant shift from a traditional education system in which about 30% of secondary school graduates would be equipped with a narrowly defined and assessed academic credential, the 'A' level, while the vast majority received awards for comparatively devalued non-academic studies. There was neither parity of esteem for vocational qualifications as opposed to academic nor was there sufficient numbers of highly trained workers in a society that was rapidly moving to a knowledge-based economy. The shift from an elitist system to that of quality mass education was to be the overarching challenge of the 90's.

III. Background: Some Recent Trends in the Political Culture of Education

"Joined up problems demand joined up solutions."
Speech, Prime Minister Tony Blair at the Stockwell Park School, Lambeth, regarding the launch of the Government's new Social Exclusion Unit
December 8, 1997

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[9] See Burke, John ed. (1995) *Outcomes, Learning and the Curriculum* for analysis of the outcomes model, its curriculum consequences and applications of the outcomes approach as well as some dismaying tales of academic in-fighting.

[10] The new Government has engaged in a public consultation process to revise and expand the Targets so that they more clearly reflect the objectives of a lifelong learning society. See DfEE (1997) *National Targets for Education and Training*, London.

An impressive feature of the British way of educational reform is the variety of research-based enquiries they conduct. Some are narrowly focused, short-term studies and others have broader mandates for investigation, analysis and recommendation for long-term policy directions. All, in Canadian terms, are well resourced and led by articulate and esteemed educators.

A number of such enquiries provided the basis for informed public discussion and government action in recent years. Three particularly important reports, initiated prior to the 1997 election were to provide an informed basis for public discussion. Two studies were headed by Sir Ron Dearing; one on provision for 16 to 19-year-olds, and the other on the directions for the higher education sector over the next 20 years.[11] The third study, led by Helena Kennedy explored ways to widen participation in the further education system.[12] These reports, as well as others during the recent past, provide a host of inter-related and recurrent themes that include:

- provision of core/key skills for employability, citizenship, and personal development
- assessment modes for outcomes-based learning
- quality assurance
- assisting teachers to learn new instructional roles
- development of credit accumulation and transfer systems
- widening access, especially for a previously socially excluded underclass
- provision of lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The study-visit team found that these themes and associated reports still resonated with our British informants and provided a wider context for discussion of the sometimes narrower questions and concerns of the team members. The team's analysis was further complicated by the dynamic changes that were occurring as a result of the newly elected government as well as the growing importance of European Union social-economic programs and funds.

The implications of recent referenda in Scotland and Wales that endorsed devolution of a wide range of national government power and responsibility to the two jurisdictions is unclear in many fields, including education and training. However the distinctive Scottish approach to higher education so highly praised in the Dearing report - more emphasis on general education, for example - will likely be reinforced, as will the trend in Wales to meet its unique characteristics and challenges such as bilingualism and smaller educational institutions. One trend is predictable, based on Canada's experience with a federal system – issues of coherence, transferability and portability will become even more important future issues in the UK.

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[11] See Dearing, Sir Ron (1996) *Review of qualifications for 16 to 19-year-olds. SCAA and (1997) Higher education in the learning society.* SCAA. Some common features of both reports include development of coherent national qualifications framework for outcomes-based programs that would enable progression and lifelong learning as well as the introduction of key skills in all sectors.

[12] See Kennedy, Helena (1997) *Learning Works: Widening participation in further education,*. FEFC. Kennedy calls upon government to create a national partnership to create a credit framework for implementation within the next five years.

IV. New Government: New Social and Economic Priorities

> **"... our vision of the future development of the knowledge based economy and investment in human capital ... will place the United Kingdom at the cutting edge of world economic change in the new Millennium. The modernisation and updating of our higher and further education systems is an essential prerequisite in ensuring that we can meet that challenge, make that investment and contribute to both economic prosperity and social cohesion."**
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> Foreward by David Blunkett, Minister for Education and Employment, in *Higher Education for the 21st Century: Response to the Dearing Report* 25 February 1998

As the spring election of 1997 approached, all three national parties (Conservative, Labour and Liberal) devised platforms informed by seminal events in Europe the year before. In 1996 the European Commission and its member states celebrated the European Year of Lifelong Learning. The Year was actively promoted by the designated national partner, the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) of England and Wales. The same year the OECD produced its report on "Lifelong Learning for All", approved by the education ministers of the groups' 29 nations, and UNESCO issued the Delors commission report on lifelong learning, "Learning: The Treasure Within". These twin reports, focused on a new paradigm of education and learning, assured that a powerful message of substantial reform was on the international and UK agendas.

The Tories, Labour, and Liberals all had lifelong learning election manifestos. The Liberals even called for a tax increase dedicated to increased funding of education. However it was Labour leader Tony Blair who, when asked about the three key campaign issues responded, "education, education, and education". True to his word, a year and a half into his government's mandate "education" is clearly the central concern of the new Labour government.

Perhaps no single action of the new government signals its commitment to tackle deeply rooted and seemingly intractable socio-economic problems as the creation and operation of its Social Exclusion Unit. The unit is part of the Economic and Domestic Affairs Secretariat in the Cabinet Office. It will not just report to the Prime Minister, indeed the first minister will personally steer the work of the unit and chair regular meetings. It is staffed by civil servants who co-ordinate its work closely with relevant Departments. The Unit's priorities, assigned by the Prime Minister, include:

* school exclusion and truancy
* people sleeping rough i.e. street living, and
* deprived neighbourhoods.

Recently a series of frank reports on these three issues have been released and multi-million pound funding promised for community-based initiatives to address them.[13]

Taken overall, a key issue for both excluded individuals and the society in which they live will be a shared capacity to learn and change. Under the heading of "social exclusion", the Blair government is attempting to come to grips with a host of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, bad health, and family breakdown. Central to the government's strategy, and its highest priority, is a new paradigm of education, training and learning – namely lifelong learning – that will achieve the twin national objectives of social inclusiveness and global competitiveness.

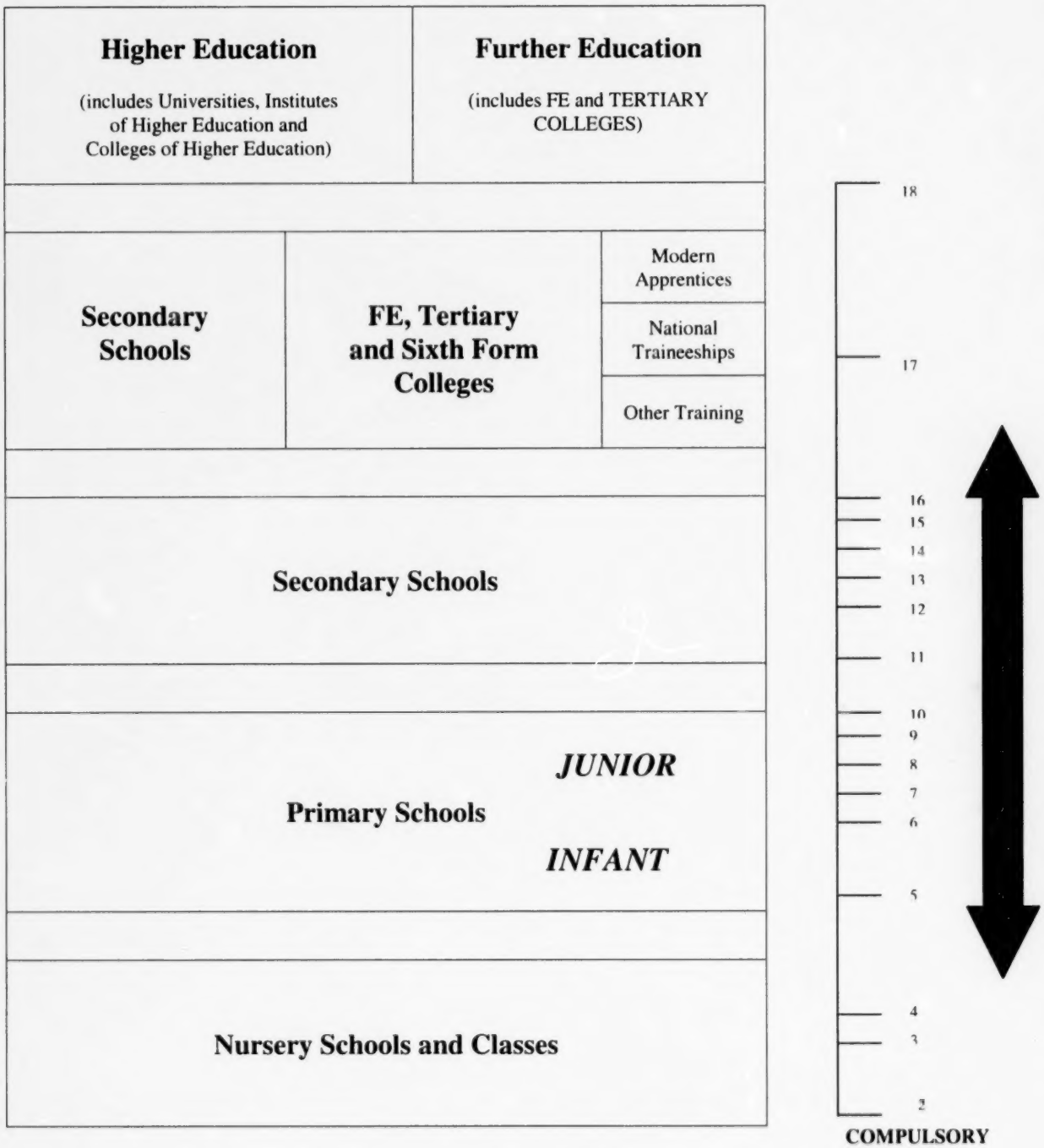
This commitment to change was made clearer following the release of the Comprehensive Spending Review in July 1998 that included plans to provide and additional 19 billion pounds for education over the next three years (199-2000 to 2001-2002). Thus by 2002 they will be spending 11 billion pounds more on education than the last administration planned to spend in 1998-99. Year 2002 targets identified in the recent Review include:

* ensuring a major boost to standards of literacy and numeracy by age 11
* cutting truancy and exclusion by a third
* increasing access to further and higher education for a further 500,000 people, raise levels of attainment at all levels post-16, and increase the proportion of those from lower income households staying on in education
* fully implementing plans for the new Web-based University for Industry

Education and social inclusion are not priorities just because they are nice things to do. According to the UK government they are the necessary things to do if their nation is to use its full human resources and social capital as they prepare for the knowledge-based economy of the 21st century.

[13] The government has released reports on each issue and then committed itself to substantial multi-year funding for initiatives largely devised and implemented by community-based groups. Blair has identified new topics. One report in December 1998 was on teenage parents and their children and another produced in the spring of 1999 was on 16 to 18 year olds who are not in education, training or employment. More information on this refreshingly frank, open and consultative form of governance may be found at the following URL: **http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/seu/index.htm**

E. THE STRUCTURE OF EDUCATION IN ENGLAND AND WALES



F. STEPS TO IMPLEMENTATION IN WALES: AN ACCOUNT OF THE CREDIS PROJECT

The following brief account of the implementation process in Wales illustrates possible issues to be considered in England.

The Welsh Office put money into a medium-term commitment to improving participation and achievements, in response to major concerns about particularly low levels of participation and achievement in Wales. The original contact for flexibility and modularisation was granted to the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) to work with colleges. Dissatisfaction with the management of the project, and slow progress towards common approaches to 'modularisation' in the new post-college incorporation environment, led to a new contract between the Welsh Office and Fforwm, the latter organisation being seen as the representative body of all colleges in Wales. The Welsh Office insisted on the involvement of all the colleges of Wales as a condition of the contract.

The All Wales Modularisation and Credit-based Development Project (later known as CREDIS) began with the appointment of the director in October 1993. It quickly gained agreement to use the Further Education Unit (FEU) model for the credit framework outlined in *A basis for credit* (FEU, 1992). This has since been widely accepted across the FE sector. It agreed the definition of a unit of assessment and guidance for writing units for the database. These definitions have since become a standard part of OCN [Open College Network] programme submissions. It also agreed that OCNs use their peer group processes involving curriculum specialists to approve new units as they were written and agree the credit ratings and levels of each unit. The Welsh Office contract required 2,000 units to be written and quality-assured within the first year and this was achieved with assistance from TECs.

In the second year the database was developed to provide access to the new units, more units were written within the context of specific learning programmes and each college was funded to develop unitised and credit-based programmes to be delivered flexibly and accredited via the local OCNs. From a low base of OCN activity and poor involvement of adult and part-time learners in Wales, activity has increased very quickly. Dissemination and technical events were planned to ensure that all college contacts and principals were fully briefed. An increasing number of curriculum specialists were brought together to share practice.

Work was started to establish credit rating of national qualifications and their units through FEDA research projects. Values were established for GNVQs, A-levels and GCSEs which were used as a basis for funding these qualifications in Wales. Across Wales, practitioner groups were co-ordinated to establish credit ratings for those NVQs most commonly delivered in colleges. These NVQ credit ratings have proved difficult to apply fully as yet, but the average credit rating has been applied for funding individual NVQ units.

The third year concentrated on producing a fully-documented resource manual on CREDIS to include guidance, quality assurance, funding and transcript data as well as the title of all the units on the database. The detailed data for the manual was produced from a co-ordinated network of technical groups using a range of college representatives (curriculum specialists, guidance, management and information systems [MIS] and funding staff and college managers). There was also a further series of college projects managed and reported on across Wales. A CD-ROM was designed to provide point and click access to all the units stored in all curriculum areas and reflecting all the levels in the emerging Wales credit framework.

The original CD-ROM, containing all approved units, and the College Resource Manual was circulated free of charge to every college and OCN in England and Wales. The latest CREDIS CD-ROM containing 7,000 curriculum units is to be released soon and five copies will be available to every college in England for £300.

In 1996-7, the final year for the CREDIS Project, projects are taking place in every college to monitor and support strategic implementation. Projects have also involved school-FE links, student tracking and issuing CREDIS transcripts, promoting the CREDIS database with employers, examining credit framework levels and reducing duplicated learning at the FE and HE interface, and bringing together student support services, curriculum and MIS staff to support student retention and progress.

The FE sector has benefited from a close dialogue with the Welsh Office, the Funding Council, the Inspectorate and TECs. Many of the findings of the work in Wales are easily extrapolated tot he context in England. The work in Wales has been delayed by the difficulty of establishing UK-wide credit ratings for national qualifications and their units, and the lack of collective development of systems for managing student data related to units and credit in England and Wales.

Mager, Caroline (ed) (1998) *Implementing a credit framework for FE.*
Research Report No. 2, Page 14, FEDA, London